JLP JOURNAL OF LAW AND POLITICS

Quebecstioning Identity: An Exploration of the Quebec Question

Abigail Brown and Marta Rodríguez-Ramiro

DOI: https://doi.org//10.69648/KZJB5467

Journal of Law and Politics (JLP), 2025; 6(2), 1-20.

jlp.ibupress.com

Online ISSN: 2671-3438

Application: 20.09.2025

Revision: 01.10.2025

Acceptance: 25.10.2025

Publication: 30.10.2025

Brown, A., & Rodríguez-Ramiro, M. (2025). Quebecstioning identity: An exploration of the Quebec question. Journal of Law and Politics, 6(2), 1-20. https://doi.org//10.69648/KZJB5467

Abigail Brown and Marta Rodríguez-Ramiro

IE University Madrid, Spain, https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3447-4750

Zabala Innovation Europe, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6128-3126

We declare no conflicts of interest.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Marta Rodriguez-Ramiro

Email: marta.rodriguez.ramiro@gmail.com

Abstract

The status of Quebec has been debated before its inception as a province. It has long sought greater autonomy within Canada, leading to ongoing debates about nationalism, federalism, and potential sovereignty. The Quebec question remains a central issue in Canadian politics, reflecting the province's unique cultural, linguistic, and historical identity. This paper uses a mixed methodology to explore the historical background of the Quebec question and the current leanings of domestic and foreign actors to understand the scope of the situation. Two referendums on independence resulted in narrow defeats for sovereignty, but the desire for recognition as a distinct society persists. The province continues to assert its autonomy through increased international engagement and economic self-sufficiency. However, the economic and political consequences of secession pose significant challenges. While tensions have eased in recent years, debates about Quebec's place in Canada remain relevant. Differing views on multiculturalism and federalism between Quebec and the rest of Canada complicate efforts to resolve the issue. This article concludes that despite the ongoing tension and debate, Quebec will remain a part of Canada. Moving forward, a complete resolution to the Quebec question will require continued dialogue, compromise, and respect for the province's identity within the broader Canadian framework.

Keywords: Identity, sovereignty, independence, Québécois, Canada

Introduction

Quebec is the largest Canadian province by area and the second largest by population; its cultural heritage and background are reflected in its official language: French. According to the 2021 census, 96% of its population uses French as their first language, and in 93% of households, French is the most spoken language (Statistics Canada, 2023). Also, although Protestantism is the main religion in Canada, with 30% of the overall population identifying as Protestant, more than half of the population in Quebec identifies as Catholic. Quebec's distinct identity, culture, and history have made it a key player in Canada's political and cultural landscape.

The ongoing political and social debate surrounding its status within Canada is known as the Quebec question. Since the country's founding in 1867, the province has asserted its right to autonomy and self-determination, creating a complex and sometimes contentious relationship with the rest of Canada. The conflict is characterized as civic and nationalist-secessionist, linked to identity markers such as religion and language. In exploration of the Quebec question, this paper examines the historical background and recent events, the role of the main actors involved, ongoing implications, and possible future scenarios for Quebec and Canada as a whole.

Discussion

Historical Background, Causes, and Development

During the Seven Years' War, France and Great Britain fought for control of North America. Following France's cession of Canada in 1763, Britain, concerned with unrest in its southern colonies, allowed the new territory's residents to retain their religion to discourage rebellion (Library of Congress, n.d.). This policy ensured the survival of the French language and Catholicism, particularly in Lower Canada (now Quebec), and was formalized in the Quebec Act of 1774.

During the nineteenth century, numerous British immigrants arrived in Canada (Linteau et al., 1983). French Canadians feared immigrants would make them a minority within their country, and, as a precautionary measure, ensured that the British would "recognize their right of a leading role in the colony's political institutions" (p. 18). However, their fears were realized following the 1837 Rebellion, when Lord Durham recommended the unification of Upper and Lower Canada. Upper Canada was Protestant-majority and English-speaking; after the unification,

Lower Canadians, who were predominantly French-speaking Catholics, would become the minority.

In 1867, the Canadian Confederation was formed from the union of the British colonies of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and the Province of Canada, which included present-day Ontario and Québec (Canadian Encyclopedia, 2017). The first census, conducted in 1871, indicated that 31.1% of the Canadian population identified as having French origins, 85.5% of which lived in Quebec (Linteau et al., 1983). Over the next few decades, the Canadian Confederation expanded to the boundaries of today's Canada. With each new alternation, the area of Quebec changed.

Immigration of non-French-speaking individuals and the emigration of the French-speaking population toward the United States (U.S.) exacerbated concerns over the dwindling French-Canadian majority (Linteau et al., 1983). In order to remedy the latter, the government implemented programs to attract immigrants to the country; Quebec, however, did not embrace this scheme, as it desired only French-speaking immigrants. In this context, we can see the beginnings of French nationalism in Quebec.

It could be argued that the French-speaking population in Quebec was right in their fear of losing their language. For example, in 1890, protections for French speakers were abolished as the number of French-speaking Canadians fell (Linteau et al., 1983). At the turn of the twentieth century, English was widespread throughout Canada, and Quebec was no exception. It was becoming more industrialized as the Québécois left rural areas and began working for large firms, which were almost exclusively run by English speakers (Rudin, 1997). The division between francophones and anglophones grew, based on language and religious differences, along with economic grievances.

As the French language continued to fall from prominence, nationalist groups emerged and pushed for three main objectives: "respect for the language rights of French-speaking minorities, implementation of bilingualism at the federal level, and a fair representation of French Canadians in the federal civil service, and making Quebec French again" (Linteau et al., 1983, p. 54).

For the purposes of this study, this last point is the most important: "making Quebec French again". This aim implies a strong sense of nationalistic pride and identity, which in the minds of the Québécois was linked to the French language. These goals show a strong desire to protect the language from people they believed were threatening a part of their identity.

Quebec also faced economic pressure. French-speaking people were still the majority but economically inferior to anglophones (Rudin, 1997). This, along with the growing importance of English, led to a growing nationalist sentiment.

In 1910, the people of Quebec reclaimed their linguistic identity through *la loi Lavergne*, which required utility companies to offer their services in both English and French (Linteau et al., 1983, p. 54).

Following the end of World War II, the Québécois saw increased economic prosperity (Marvin, 2010), but it was not enjoyed by all, and just like before, there was economic inequality between French- and English-speaking Canadians.

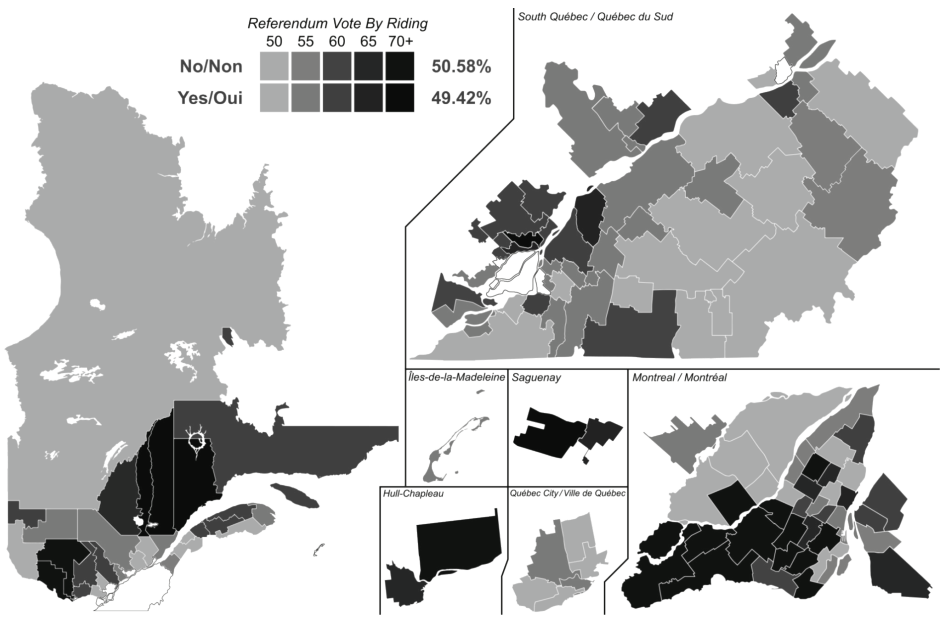
In 1950, large amounts of money were invested in the education system with the hopes of assisting French speakers and closing the economic gap (Rudin, 1997). Despite the flood of resources, the Catholic Church remained in control of most French schools, which were often accessible only to the wealthiest (Marvin, 2010).

It was not until the 1960s, through the Quiet Revolution, that things started to change for francophones (Cuccioletta & Lubin, 2011). After the victory of the Parti liberal du Québec (PLQ), Quebec's new Premier Jean Lesage began to make sweeping changes. French education was separated from the Catholic Church, allowing for more educational equity and a greater chance of social mobility (Marvin, 2010). Other measures included the creation of the Office québécois de la langue française in 1961 and the officialization of French in Quebec in 1977 (Library of Congress, n.d.). The conflict between English and French was finally over; French had won.

At the same time, Quebec began to pull away from the federal government (Marvin, 2010). Despite advancements for the sovereignty of Quebec, staunch nationalists did not view this progress as enough. A sovereignty referendum was held in 1980, in which the "No" side won with 60% of the vote (Weiss, 1998). The 1995 referendum produced a similar outcome, though by a much narrower margin: 51% opposed sovereignty. Support for independence was strongest among francophones and young, educated individuals born during or after the Quiet Revolution (Duchesne et al., 2003). Industry workers and members of the elite were also more likely to favor separation (Loh, 1975). Figure 1 presents a spatial breakdown of the votes cast during the second referendum. The territories further north showed a stronger support for independence, while those to the south mostly voted against secession.

Figure 1:

Map of the 1995 Québec referendum by ridings



Note. Adapted from "Quebec referendum, 1995 – Results By Riding" by DrRandomFactor, 2017, Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Quebec_referendum,_1995_-_Results_By_Riding.svg).

During the referendum campaigns, a key strategy involved downplaying outright independence in favor of a more ambiguous concept of sovereignty to appeal to a broader segment of voters (Rocher, 2014). The wording of the 1995 referendum question reflected this approach, remaining vague and suggesting that Quebec would retain economic and political ties with Canada even after achieving sovereignty (Rocher, 2002).

Main Actors

In the conflict over independence, two main groups of actors emerge: the sovereignists, who support it, and the federalists, who oppose it.

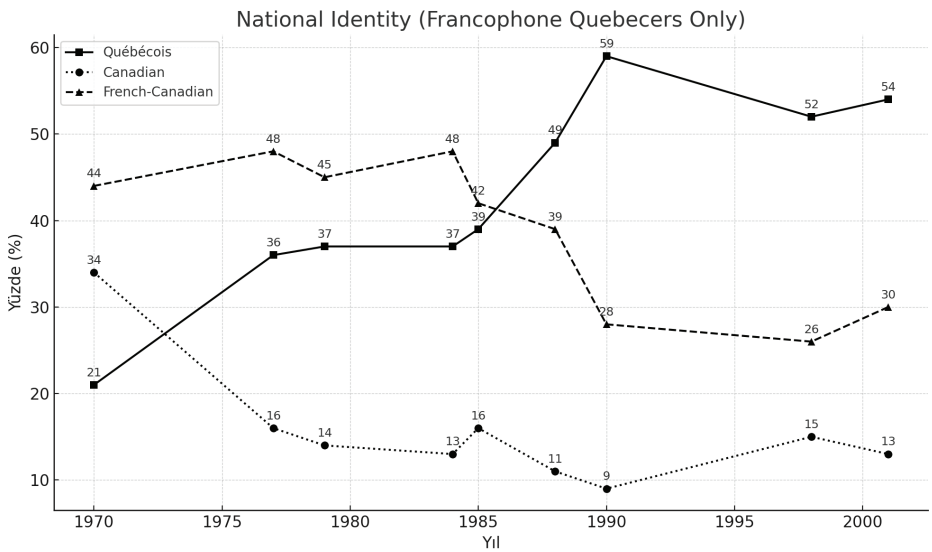
Sovereignists

Besides the French language, the identity of French Canadians was tied to Roman Catholicism, in contrast with Protestantism, observed by the English-speaking population, linking national and religious identities.

However, during the Quiet Revolution, the Catholic Church lost social support and followers due to Premier Lesage's reforms, which ushered Quebec into a golden era of secularization and modernization. The province moved away from messianism, agriculturalism, and traditional nationalism, embracing statism, industrialism, and a more modern sense of nationalism (Létourneau & Moors, 1989).

Modernization had an unintended consequence: ethnic nationalism shifted into a more civic and territorial form of nationalism (Keating, 1996), as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2



Question: Would you define yourself as a Canadian, French Canadian, Quebecer, or a Canadian of another origin?

Source: Maurice Pinard, (1997). Un Combat Inachevé, chap. 4; CRIC/CROP: 1998, 2001. Note: Reported percentages are averages of two polls in the following years: 1977, 1979, 1984.

Note. Evolution of self-identification among the Québécois (Mendelsohn, 2002)

The overarching objective of sovereignists is Quebec's independence from the rest of Canada to preserve their language, culture, and religion (Weiss, 1998), as well as to provide "an opportunity for [the] political, economic and social regeneration for the 'French-Canadian people'" (Rocher, 2014, pp. 26-27).

Political Parties

The Parti québécois (PQ) rose to power in 1976 with the goal of independence, backed by young, well-educated members of the middle and upper-middle classes (Clarke, 1983). Currently, it also receives considerable support from semi- and unskilled workers and unemployed people. The failure of the 1980 referendum led to the political demise of the PQ, but it returned to power in 1994 and organized a second referendum.

The Bloc québécois was formed in 1991 to promote sovereignty on the national stage. It became the main source of opposition in Ottawa after the 1993 federal election, achieving 49% of the vote in Quebec (Bélanger, 2004). The economic recession, together with pre-existing grievances about Quebec's political alienation from the rest of Canada, was one of the major factors behind its success. Today, the Bloc's electorate closely resembles that of its provincial counterpart, the PQ, though it is less popular among the bourgeoisie and draws some support from rural voters. Additionally, the LGBTQ+ community forms a significant part of its electoral base (Perrella et al., 2012).

Coalition Avenir Quebec (CAQ) was created in 2011 as an alternative to both the PLQ and the PQ, from which it emerged. The right-wing populist party, which came to power for the first time in 2018 and has ruled the province ever since, opposes anglophone immigration. Its ideology reflects a pragmatic conservative nationalism that "attempts to coalesce sovereignists and federalists" by attempting to restore a sense of Québécois pride (Nahmias, 2020, p. 1). The party appeals to the francophone middle class that lives in the suburbs.

Québec solidaire (QS) is a left-wing party that advocates social justice and ecological issues. It was born in 2006 as a citizen movement formed by environmentalists, feminists, and members of trade unions in response to political disaffection after the failure of the 1995 referendum (Pelletier, 2012). The party aimed "to renew how politics was done: its internal operations [...]; the place of women [...]" and stressed "the importance of consensus in the decision-making process [...] [and] collective leadership" (Dufour, 2008, p. 75).

Its voter base is younger, more well-educated and more nationalist than that of the other sovereignist parties (Pelletier, 2012). QS emerged as a fresh, progressive alternative to separatist parties during a time of political upheaval and managed to attract the disenfranchised youth.

Table 1 shows the percentage of votes obtained by each party since 1960.

Table 1

Election	PLQ	Union nationale	PQ	CAQ	QS
1960	**51.4%**	46.6%			
1962	**56.4%**	42.2%			
1966	47.3%	**40.8%**			
1970	**45.4%**	19.6%	23.1%		
1973	**54.7%**	4.9%	30.2%		
1976	33.8%	18.2%	**41.4%**		
1981	46.1%	4%	**49.2%**		
1985	**56%**	0.2%	38.7%		
1989	**49.9%**		40.2%		
1994	44.7%		**44.4%**	6.5%	
1998	43.5%		**42.9%**	11.8%	
2003	**45.9%**		33.2%	18.1%	
2007	**33.1%**		28.4%	30.8%	3.6%
2008	**42.1%**		35.2%	16.4%	3.8%
2012	31.2%		31.9%	27%	6%
2014	**41.5%**		25.3%	23%	7.6%
2018	24.82%		17.06%	**37.42%**	16.1%
2022	14.37%		14.61%	**40.98%**	15.43%

Note. Vote shares of political parties since 1960. Own elaboration, data from Assamblée nationale du Québec (2009)

Civil Society

Most francophone journalists supported independence, which affected their coverage of politics. During the 1966 election, the PQ's precursor received exclusively

positive coverage, while the Liberal Party faced heavy criticism. After the PQ's victory in 1976, some former journalists who had taken prominent positions within the party faced a dilemma: balancing journalistic objectivity with their political sympathies (Hazel, 2001). They opted for a form of sympathetic journalism, continuing to criticize the government but with restraint, and practiced cautious objectivity by reporting statements from both sovereignists and federalists without verifying their accuracy.

Student activism emerged during the Quiet Revolution, driven by the realization that "without changes in the fundamental structure of Canadian and Quebec societies, French-speaking Quebecers would always suffer from the limitations of their minority status", especially as English-speaking workers in Quebec earned 40% more (LeBlanc, 1971, p. 27). Initially, students overwhelmingly supported the PQ but soon grew disillusioned with its electoral outcomes and shifted their support to the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ).

The most significant civil actor was the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ), a terrorist organization active from 1963 to 1973. Founded with the goal of dividing English and French interests and establishing a sovereign Quebec, the FLQ operated in decentralized cells of five to seven members, often formed by groups of friends united by the common ideal of independence (Crelinsten, 2001). These cells targeted symbols of English dominance, such as statues of anglophone historical figures and English-language radio stations, and their actions culminated in the infamous 1970 kidnappings known as the October Crisis (Marvin, 2010). In October of that year, one cell abducted British diplomat James Cross and Quebec Labor Minister Pierre Laporte, the latter of whom was killed a week later (Weiss, 1998). By 1971, all cells had been infiltrated by police, effectively bringing the organization to an end. Due to its disorganized structure, the FLQ's ideology and rhetoric evolved over time. Its first manifesto "was addressed to 'patriots', the enemy was 'Anglo-Saxon colonialism' and the solution was 'national independence'" (Crelinsten, 2001, p. 60). By 1970, however, the group's rhetoric had shifted to a Marxist tone, appealing to "the 'workers of Quebec', the enemies were the 'big bosses', finance companies, banks, and the solution was a made-in-Quebec revolution". Another key element of the FLQ's ideology was its rejection of Catholic morality, which it saw as glorifying passivity and serving as both a root cause and a symptom of Québécois colonial oppression (Ciufo, 2012).

During the October Crisis, the FLQ initially received a wave of public sympathy and even support from some civil organizations. The Parti Québécois, for instance,

advocated for a negotiated resolution to the kidnappings (Crelinsten, 2001). However, public opinion swiftly shifted after the murder of Pierre Laporte, leading most to rally behind the government. The group's internal disorganization ultimately hastened its collapse: the cell responsible for Laporte's abduction had little food, no funding, and chose Laporte largely because he lived nearby.

Federalists

Federalists advocate for a united Canada. As Laforest (2010) argues, "the only way for English-speaking Canadians to express their national identity is to undermine the provincial autonomy that has made it possible for Quebecers to express their national identity" (p. 16). From this perspective, Québécois nationalism is seen as a threat not only to Canada's federalist framework but also to the national identity of anglophones. Federalists uphold the rule of law and Canada's territorial integrity, asserting that federalism is not a zero-sum game—Canada does not benefit when Quebec loses, nor does Quebec gain by weakening the federal structure (Laforest, 2010). Instead, they view federalism as a system designed to balance competing interests, reconciling pan-Canadian priorities with provincial autonomy (Taucar, 2004).

They argue that federalism requires a careful balance between autonomy, solidarity, and interdependence, viewing it as "a particular way of sharing political power among different peoples within a state" (Balthazar, 1995, p. 44). They contend that recognizing Quebec as a distinct society challenges the principle of provincial equality (Laforest, 2010, pp. 30–31).

As support for sovereignty grew in the lead-up to the 1995 referendum, federalist forces, led primarily by the PLQ and the Union nationale, began proposing alternatives to independence. These included decentralizing power, increasing agreements on immigration, and enhancing workforce training (Gagnon & Lachapelle, 1996). Federalists also endorsed a neoliberal agenda supported by business leaders and high-income earners (LeDuc, 1977).

Anglophone Canadians

Anglophones generally support a united Canada, believing that most Canadians share core liberal democratic values and fundamental principles (Carens, 1995). They tend to feel stronger attachment to the nation than to individual provinces—a contrast to francophones, who often prioritize provincial identity (LeDuc, 1977). In the event of Quebec's independence, Anglo-Canadians foresee three

possibilities: emigrating from the province, remaining as a minority, or staying and adopting a Québécois identity. They also argue that the Quebec government cannot realistically implement the sovereignty-association model proposed in the first referendum, as it lacks the authority to guarantee a formal association with the rest of Canada after independence.

Anglophone Québécois have also asserted their place by invoking their long-standing presence in Quebec, which they argue grants them historically legitimized rights—challenging the sovereignist narrative of Quebec as a unified, homogeneous nation (Penrose, 1994). Fearing that Quebec's potential independence would render them a marginalized group, anglophones often portray separatists as political fanatics, equate separatism with leftist ideology, and allege that the movement has received support from foreign actors such as France and, historically, the Soviet Union (Weiss, 1998).

Government of Canada

The Canadian government's primary objective has been to suppress separatism and prevent Quebec's independence. In the 1960s, it demonstrated a willingness to negotiate with Quebec's Liberal government, making concessions such as allowing the province to develop its own social welfare programs (Pious, 1973). However, during the October Crisis the Liberal provincial premier refused to negotiate with the FLQ and instead requested federal intervention. In response, the government invoked the War Measures Act, suspending civil liberties across the entire country (Pious, 1973).

In the lead-up to the 1980 referendum, Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau promised constitutional reform, which was eventually enacted in 1982 despite the PQ's refusal to sign it (Foot, 2016). The Meech Lake Accord later sought to persuade the Québécois government to endorse the constitutional changes by offering five key conditions, including the recognition of Quebec as a "distinct society" and increased control over immigration (Watts, 1996). However, the Accord ultimately failed when it was not ratified by all provincial governments.

After the second referendum, Jean Chrétien's Liberal government adopted a two-pronged strategy to address sovereignist aspirations. Plan A involved conciliatory measures, such as recognizing Quebec as a distinct society (Foot, 2016). Plan B focused on the legality of Quebec's unilateral secession, with a 1998 Supreme Court ruling declaring it unconstitutional without a clear majority. The 2000 Clarity Act further defined a clear majority as 50% plus one. Together, these strategies aimed to strengthen federal authority while accommodating some of Quebec's demands.

However, neither has succeeded and, in some cases, they have backfired. As Watts (1996, p. 367) explains, "the essence of any federal system involves the combination of both the recognition and accommodation of regional distinctiveness and sufficient federal powers and emphasis on shared values [...] to hold together distinct groups within the federation."

International Actors

Although Quebec separatism is primarily a national issue, some international actors have played influential roles. France, due to its shared history and cultural ties, has been particularly supportive of Quebec's participation in international events and agreements (Smiley, 1978). When Premier Lévesque visited France in 1977, he was honored with distinctions typically reserved for foreign heads of state. France's interest in Quebec stemmed from concerns about growing U.S. cultural influence, leading it to adopt the "two nations" thesis, which frames Canada as a dual country—an anglophone nation centered in Ottawa and a francophone one based in Quebec City (Meren, 2012). The Québécois have embraced this perspective, often referring to the French as "a brother people" (Meren, 2012, p. 90). Consequently, Quebec has developed cooperative policies with other French-speaking countries and holds membership in the Francophonie.

Due to its geographical proximity, the U.S. has also played a role, though a relatively minimal one. Historically, it has supported Canadian federalism out of concern for how Quebec's independence might impact its economic interests, despite reassurances from the PQ on this front (Smiley, 1978). However, the role of the U.S. could intensify under Donald Trump's second term presidency, as he has notably suggested that Canada should become the 51st state (Froman, 2025). The Trump administration's imposition of new tariffs and related threats poses serious risks to the Canadian economy, potentially exacerbating internal divisions and providing Quebec with an opportunity to advance its sovereignty agenda.

Consequences and Future Scenarios

Consequences

The Quebec separatist movement is notable among separatist struggles for its predominantly peaceful nature (Geloso & Grier, 2022). While the FLQ resorted to violence during the October Crisis, their actions ultimately led to a loss of public support. The peaceful faction, led by former Premier Lévesque and represented by

the PQ, seized this moment to distance itself from violence, publicly condemning the FLQ as terrorists. In recent decades, the Québécois question has cooled due to factors such as the narrow defeat in the 1995 referendum, the 1998 Supreme Court ruling, and the 2000 Clarity Act. These developments, particularly the requirement for a clear referendum question presenting a binary choice between secession and the status quo, as well as the necessity of a clear majority, have tempered pro-independence enthusiasm (Miranda, 2013).

Despite the decline, the PQ managed to hold onto power until 2003, when it was succeeded by the PLQ (Miranda, 2013). Only in 2012 was the PQ able to regain leadership and form a minority government. Its proposals included creating Quebec citizenship and transferring powers over employment insurance, copyright policy, and foreign assistance to the Quebec government. However, the possibility of another independence referendum was not addressed.

The global economic crisis also contributed to diminished focus on Quebec's secession. Economic growth in Canada has shifted from the east and center to the western provinces (Miranda, 2013). Alberta, with one of the world's largest oil reserves, and British Columbia, notable for its significant trade ties with China, have gained increased importance. This shift has made Western provinces more skeptical of the secession debate, viewing it as a pretext to favor Quebec, which is less interested in welcoming non-Francophone immigrants. Both referendums had significant economic consequences, prompting companies and banks to relocate their headquarters to Toronto. Moreover, Quebec's economic growth has lagged behind the Canadian average, with its share of the country's GDP declining from 20.5% in 1981 to 18.5% in 2006 (EP, 2017). Emigration has been a significant factor, making Quebec the only Canadian province to experience population loss. Reports indicate that the federal government spends four billion dollars more in Quebec than the province generates in revenue (Miranda, 2013), reinforcing perceptions of preferential treatment and potentially fueling a "let them go" attitude among some Canadians. Many Québécois recognize that, while an independent Quebec could be economically viable, its growth would likely lag behind that of Canada, a major economic power with a high quality of life. Economic assets would probably continue migrating westward, and the new state would lose access to resources currently provided by Ottawa.

The role of the U.S. warrants consideration, especially as its stance toward Canada is evolving. Some scholars predict that if Quebec were to gain independence, certain Canadian provinces might join the U.S., leaving Quebec as a standalone entity in North America. Until recently, the U.S. has emphasized the importance

of Canadian unity, including Quebec (Miranda, 2013). However, as noted earlier, President Trump has repeatedly suggested that Canada should become the 51st state (Weissert, 2025). This raises questions about whether the current administration might support Quebec's independence as a means to weaken Canada and facilitate its eventual absorption by the U.S.

Another factor contributing to the cooling of the separatist issue is the clear stance of Quebec's Indigenous peoples, the vast majority of whom favor remaining in Canada or oppose an independent Quebec. Although Quebec authorities do not officially recognize the possibility of "secession within secession," it is clear that this issue would need to be addressed in any future independence scenario (Miranda, 2013).

In short, the current situation is a stalemate. Independence appears to be a remote possibility, owing to Canadian federalism's capacity to adapt itself to nationalist circumstances, which has enabled it to maintain confederation unity. It is highly probable that what political scientists refer to as the "Québécois paradox" remains on the mind of the Quebec government. History shows that when the PQ is in opposition, its electoral prospects increase. However, once in power and after attempts to push forward the sovereignty process fail, its level of support decreases significantly (Miranda, 2013). This is because most Québécois support their distinct identity while still rejecting secession from Canada.

Future Scenarios

In the event of Quebec's independence, tension could arise along the eastern border of the province, which separates Quebec from Newfoundland and Labrador, as shown in Figure 3. Despite being the longest interprovincial boundary, it has never been formally recognized or demarcated by the Quebec government. Quebec's claims to independence would make it a non-defined international border (Jacobs, 2012).

Although there are no immediate plans for a new referendum, the Quebec government has significantly increased its level of engagement in international relations, surpassing what is typical for a province. The number of Québécois delegations abroad is comparable to that of a medium-sized country's foreign service (Aguirre & Iván, 2018). The advancement of Quebec's international profile could be seen as preparation for independence. However, a new referendum has not occurred in almost 30 years, and support for complete separation seems to be waning.

Figure 3:

Map of the border dispute between Quebec and Newfoundland (Burgess, 2012)



The federal government has been unable to find a solution that meets the desired constitutional recognition of Quebec as a "distinct society" or acknowledges its special character. The lack of resolution partly stems from the different perspectives on the role of federalism held by the Québécois and the rest of the Canadians (Aguirre & Iván, 2018).

One could argue that the federal government and the predominantly Anglo-Saxon provinces favor multiculturalism, that is, recognizing the contributions of all cultures to modern Canada without explicitly defining a singular Canadian nationality (Winter, 2007). Additionally, the Anglo-Saxon majority views federalism as a framework ensuring equality among provinces. Since Quebec is one of ten

provinces, granting it special recognition risks undermining interprovincial legal equality and potentially destabilizing national politics (Aguirre & Iván, 2018).

The Québécois had the chance to express their opinion regarding statehood, and 51% of them decided not to secede. However, it is possible that the underlying reason is that at least half identify with the national project: a developed country with a good quality of life and a reputation for promoting world peace (Aguirre & Iván, 2018). In our view, it is unlikely that another referendum will occur soon and, if one were to take place, we strongly believe that Quebec would choose to remain part of Canada. Save for a dramatic change, like the rise of an anti-French or anti-Quebec federal party, the push for secession will remain part of the discourse but will not achieve the necessary support for a referendum vote to pass.

As mentioned above, the economic consequences of independence could be challenging, as Quebec would likely experience slower growth compared to Canada. This could result in a lower standard of living for the Québécois than they currently enjoy. Nevertheless, Quebec has the potential to function as a sovereign state, thanks to its abundant natural resources, developed industrial base, advanced technology, and highly educated population. Moreover, Quebec's longstanding commitment to democracy and human rights would provide the legitimacy needed for international recognition.

Conclusion

The Quebec question remains a defining and unresolved issue within Canadian politics, shaped by deep-rooted historical, linguistic, and cultural factors. While the province has continuously sought greater autonomy and recognition as a distinct society, efforts toward full independence have been met with political, economic, and social challenges. The referendums of 1980 and 1995, though unsuccessful in securing independence, revealed the persistent nationalist aspirations among many Québécois.

Over time, economic considerations, shifts in political leadership, and evolving perspectives on federalism have influenced the trajectory of the Quebec question. While the movement for independence has lost some of its urgency, Quebec continues to assert its distinct identity through international engagement and policy initiatives that differentiate it from the rest of Canada. The debate remains a complex balancing act between Quebec's desire for autonomy and the broader framework of Canadian unity.

Moving forward, the resolution of the Quebec question will likely depend on continued dialogue and compromise. The challenge lies in reconciling Quebec's unique cultural and linguistic identity with the principles of federalism and national cohesion. Whether through further decentralization, renewed discussions on constitutional recognition, or evolving socio-political dynamics, the future of Quebec within Canada remains an open-ended question—one that requires mutual understanding and respect from all parties involved.

References

Aguirre, M., & Iván, C. (2018). Quebec and Canada a definitive union?. *Voices of Mexico*. https://ru.micisan.unam.mx/bitstream/handle/123456789/18530/VOM_2005_0070_0109.pdf?sequence=1

Assamblée nationale du Québec. (2009, June 17). *La répartition des voix aux* élections *générales*. https://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/patrimoine/votes.html

Balthazar, L. (1995). Quebec and the ideal of federalism. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *538*(1), 40–53. https://doi.org/10.1177/000271629553800000

Bélanger, É. (2004). The rise of third parties in the 1993 Canadian federal election: Pinard revisited. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, *37*(3), 581–594. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0008423904020554

Burgess, J. (2012, July 10). Oh, (No) Canada!. *The New York Times*. https://archive.nytimes.com/opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/07/10/oh-no-canada/index.html

Canadian Encyclopedia. (2017). *Confederation, 1867*. https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/confederation-1867

Carens, J. H. (1995). *Is Quebec nationalism just?: Perspectives from anglophone Canada*. McGill-Queen's University Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt80shx

Ciufo, C. L. (2012). *Partipriests and Frèrequistes? Parti Pris, the Front de libération du Québec, and the Catholicity of Québécois Anticlericalism, 1963-1970* [Master's thesis, Queen's University]. https://www.proquest.com/docview/1511455369?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true

Clarke, H. D. (1983). The Parti Québécois and sources of partisan realignment in contemporary Quebec. *The Journal of Politics*, *45*(1), 64–85. https://doi.org/10.2307/2130325

Crelinsten, R. D. (2001). The internal dynamics of the FLQ during the October Crisis of 1970. In D. C. Rapoport (Ed.), *Inside Terrorist Organizations* (pp. 59–89). Frank Cass.

Cuccioletta, D., & Lubin, M. (2011). The Quebec quiet revolution: A noisy evolution. In M. D. Behiels & M. Hayday (Eds.), *Contemporary Quebec: Selected Readings and Commentaries* (pp. 182–197). McGill-Queen's Press.

DrRandomFactor. (2017). *Quebec Referendum, 1995 - Results by Riding*. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Quebec_referendum,_1995_-_ Results_By_Riding.svg

Duchesne, E., Eagles, M., & Erfle, S. (2003). Constituency homogeneity, economic risk and support for Quebec sovereignty: A Research Note. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, *36*(3), 643–656. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0008423903778809

Dufour, P. (2008). From protest to partisan politics: When and how collective actors cross the line? Sociological Perspective on Québec Solidaire. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, *34*(1), 55–82. https://doi.org/10.29173/cjs591

EP. (2017, October 15). El ejemplo de Quebec: Perdió empresas y su PIB creció menos que la media de Canadá tras el referéndum de 1980. *Expansión*. https://www.expansion.com/economia/politica/2017/10/15/59e3320146163fd9758b4605.html

Foot, R. (2016, February 7). *Separatism in Canada*. The Canadian Encyclopedia. https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/separatism

Froman, M. (2025, March 14). What's the matter with Canada? *Council on Foreign Relations*. https://www.cfr.org/article/whats-matter-canada

Gagnon, A.-G., & Lachapelle, G. (1996). Québec confronts Canada: Two competing societal projects searching for legitimacy. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, *26*(3), 177–191. https://doi.org/10.2307/3330627

Geloso, V. J., & Grier, K. B. (2022). Love on the rocks: The causal effects of separatist governments in Quebec. *European Journal of Political Economy*, *71*, 102088. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0176268021000781#sec2

Hazel, K.-J. (2001). The media and nationalism in Québec: A complex relationship. *Journalism Studies*, *2*(1), 93–107. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700120021829

Keating, M. (1996). *Nations against the State: The new politics of nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia and Scotland*. Springer.

Laforest, G. (2010). The meaning of Canadian federalism in Québec: Critical reflections. *Revista d'Estudis Autonòmics i Federals*, *11*, 10–55. https://doi.org/https://raco.cat/index.php/REAF/article/view/250666/335524

LeBlanc, A. E. (1971). Student activism in Quebec. *Change*, *3*(2), 26–28. https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/40161193

LeDuc, L. (1977). Canadian attitudes towards Quebec independence. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *41*(3), 347–355. https://doi.org/10.1086/268392

Létourneau, J., & Moors, J. (1989). The unthinkable history of Quebec. *The Oral History Review*, *17*(1), 89–116. https://doi.org/10.1093/ohr/17.1.89

Linteau, P., Durocher, R., & Robert, J. (1983). *Quebec: A history 1867-1929*. James Lorimer & Company.

Loh, W. D. (1975). Nationalist attitudes in Quebec and Belgium. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *19*(2), 217–249. https://doi.org/10.1177/002200277501900202

Marvin, N. E. (2010). *Bricolage nationalism: An intellectual history of the Front de Libération du Québec* [Bachelor's thesis, Wesleyan University]. https://doi.org/10.14418/wes01.1.1743

Mendelsohn, M. (2002). Measuring national identity and patterns of attachment: Quebec and nationalist mobilization. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, *8*(3), 72–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/13537110208428670

Meren, D. (2012). *With friends like these: Entangled nationalisms and the Canada-Quebec-France Triangle, 1944-1970*. UBC Press.

Miranda, A. C. (2013). Canadá y la cuestión de Quebec (II): La separación-integración de Quebec en la Federación Canadiense. *Cuadernos de Pensamiento Político*, 83-105. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23511962

Nahmias, J. (2020). Pragmatic conservative nationalism: The Coalition Avenir Quebec. [Master's thesis, The University of Western Ontario]. https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/politicalscience_maresearchpapers/5

Pelletier, R. (2012). *Les partis politiques québécois dans la tourmente*. Presses de l'Université Laval.

Penrose, J. (1994). I. 'Mon pays ce n'est pas un pays' full stop: The concept of nation as a challenge to the nationalist aspirations of the Parti Québécois. *Political Geography*, *13*(2), 161–181. https://doi.org/10.1016/0962-6298(94)90019-1

Perrella, A. M. L., Brown, S. D., & Kay, B. J. (2012). Voting behaviour among the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered electorate. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, *45*(1), 89–117. https://doi.org/10.1017/s000842391100093x

Pious, R. (1973). Canada and the crisis of Quebec. *Journal of International Affairs*, *27*(1), 53–65. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24356609

Rocher, F. (2002). The evolving parameters of Quebec nationalism. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, *4*(1), 74–96. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000138786

Rocher, F. (2014). Self-determination and the use of referendums: The case of Quebec. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, *27*(1), 25–45. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-013-9167-2

Rudin, R. (1997). *Making history in twentieth-century Quebec*. University of Toronto Press.

Smiley, D. (1978). The Canadian Federation and the challenge of Quebec independence. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, *8*(1), 199–224. https://doi.org/10.2307/3329637

Statistics Canada. (2019, 2020, 2023). *Census of population*. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/index-eng.cfm

Taucar, C. E. (2004). *Canadian federalism and Quebec sovereignty*. Peter Lang.

Watts, R. L. (1996). Canada: Three decades of periodic federal crises. *International Political Science Review*, *17*(4), 353–371. https://doi.org/10.1177/019251296017004002

Weiss, A. (1998). Separations and unities: Approaches to Québec separatism in English- and French-Canadian Fantastic Literature. *Science Fiction Studies*, *25*(1), 53–60. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4240673

Weissert, W. (2025, February 13). Trump's remarks on Canada becoming the 51st state raise a lot of questions. *The Associated Press*. https://apnews.com/article/how-canada-could -become-us-state-42360e10ded96c0046fd11eaaf55ab88

Winter, E. (2007). Neither 'America'nor 'Québec': Constructing the Canadian multicultural nation. *Nations and nationalism*, *13*(3), 481-503. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2007.00295.x?casa_token=G5IGfpIzKl0AAAAA:P_m8SmzjzPWUCPWBl-B9i2l9WsGFEplfElqSoLYRBDRERB-JJa-CrU1kqzLAkehxzLbxGVZl9TRfS